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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

At the 3775th meeting of the Security Council, held on 8 May 1997 in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "The situation in Croatia", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council welcomes the letter of the Secretary-General of 29 April 1997 (S/1997/343), which conveys the conclusions of the Transitional Administrator regarding the successful holding of the elections in the region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium in the Republic of Croatia beginning on 13 April 1997, under the direction of the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES).

"The Security Council shares the assessment of the Transitional Administrator that the holding of these elections has been an essential step for further progress in the peaceful reintegration of the region and marks an important milestone for the legitimate representation of the local population in the Croatian constitutional and legal system. It urges early formation of the newly elected bodies of local government and prompt and full implementation of the undertakings contained in the Basic Agreement (S/1995/951, annex) and the letter from the Government of Croatia of 13 January 1997 (S/1997/27, annex), including the establishment of the Joint Council of Municipalities and the appointment of local Serbs to the guaranteed positions in the parliamentary and administrative structures of Croatia.

"The Security Council underlines the Transitional Administrator's finding that no intimidation, violence or electoral improprieties were observed or reported before, during or after the elections. The Council welcomes the good-will and sense of cooperation demonstrated by the parties to the process.

"The Security Council emphasizes the importance of the two-way return of all displaced persons in Croatia, as well as the right of residents of a State to choose freely where they wish to live. In this context, it welcomes the Agreement of the Joint Working Group on the Operational

Procedures of Return (S/1997/341, annex). It urges the Government of Croatia strictly to implement this Agreement. The Council calls upon both sides to cooperate in good faith on the basis of the Basic Agreement and stresses the need to respect human rights, including rights of persons belonging to minorities, throughout the country, in order to ensure the success of the process of reintegration.

"The Security Council expresses its appreciation to UNTAES and to those elements of the international community, including observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and members of the diplomatic community, whose efforts made possible the successful holding of elections. The Council commends UNTAES for resolving technical difficulties by taking decisive actions, which contributed significantly to the successful holding of the elections.

"The Security Council looks forward to the recommendations of the Secretary-General, in the light of the parties' progress towards fulfilling the Basic Agreement, for the further United Nations presence in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium, possibly a restructured UNTAES, consistent with the fulfilment of the Basic Agreement, for the six-month period beginning from 16 July 1997, in accordance with its resolution 1079 (1996)."